

Youth Leadership Forum

History and Overview

Youth Leadership Forum is a career leadership training program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. The YLF provides young people with disabilities with an opportunity to learn full citizenship skills, thereby enhancing both their employment potential and their ability to contribute to society. Developed by the California Governor's Committee for Employment of Disabled Persons in 1992, and now a program of the US Department of Labor, the YLF has been replicated in 21 states, DC and Puerto Rico, with planning groups underway in fifteen more states.

The YLF has been designed for implementation at the state level as a five-day concentrated educational and motivational experience, during which the delegates participate in a wide range of activities and learning experiences in small and large group sessions. Delegates take part in facilitated discussions and exercises designed to develop their personal leadership and career development plans. The delegates attend presentations where they learn that they have the opportunity for an education and a life in their communities. They are introduced to the history of disability rights in the US and begin to develop a sense of pride as members of the greater community of people with disabilities. In order to provide leadership by example, the staff and the presenters at the YLF are successful and accomplished adults with disabilities who have traveled the same path these young people are facing. At the end of the YLF, the student delegates make a commitment to follow through on various goals they set for themselves.

In March 2000 representatives from Idaho attended the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) Train-the-Trainer conference sponsored by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. The conference was conducted by members of the YLF planning groups from other states that have gone through the experience of planning and implementing a YLF with supporting staff from the President's Committee. In exchange for attending the training, participants agreed to plan a YLF in their state. Idaho received a "seed grant" from the US Department of Labor to assist with planning and conducting the state's first YLF in July 2001.

Beginning in July 2000, the YLF Executive Committee began planning the first YLF in Idaho. Idaho's first annual Youth Leadership Forum was held in July 2001 and the latest forum was held in 2004. A Youth Leadership Summit was held in August of 2005, bringing together past YLF delegates and other youth to meet with agencies and organizations to discuss the future of youth leadership and development activities in Idaho. A one day summit was held in 2006 as part of the Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair.

We are currently planning for the exciting fifth annual YLF held June 23-27 in Boise, Idaho. Delegates are selected from applications received from across Idaho. The 2008 Youth Leadership Forum will bring together 20-25 student delegates to the campus of Boise State University. Highlights of the week will include a Job Shadow Experience, Employers Breakfast, Policymaker Panel and various recreational activities.